

‘Keep up the fight:’ Venezuela opposition on eve of protests

AFP – Venezuelan opposition leader Maria Corina Machado urged supporters Friday to “keep up the fight” on the eve of protests called against the election victory claimed by strongman Nicolas Maduro but widely rejected at home and abroad.

Anti-Maduro protests have claimed 25 lives so far, with dozens injured and more than 2,400 arrested since the July 28 vote that both the president and opposition say they had won.

Machado had called for fresh demonstrations in more than 300 cities in Venezuela and abroad on Saturday – what she called a “Protest for the Truth.”

She herself will participate in a march in the capital Caracas, where supporters of the regime have also vowed to gather.

The country’s CNE electoral council proclaimed Maduro the winner of a third six-year term, giving him 52 percent of votes cast but without providing a detailed breakdown of the results.

The opposition says polling station-level results show its candidate Edmundo Gonzalez Urrutia won more than two-thirds of the vote.

Gonzales Urrutia had replaced Machado on the ballot after her candidacy was blocked by institutions loyal to Maduro, in office since 2013.

The duo has been mostly in hiding since the president accused them post-election of seeking to foment a “coup d’etat” and called for them to be jailed.

Maduro's victory claim has been rejected by the United States, European Union and several Latin American countries.

Machado called in a live Instagram broadcast Friday for people to "keep up the fight" and stand strong against Maduro's strategy of "demoralization" through "lies, repression, violence."

Neighbors Colombia and Brazil on Thursday called for fresh elections in Venezuela, but Machado said this would show "a lack of respect" for the popular will already expressed on July 28.

Maduro, for his part, insisted Friday afternoon that Venezuela does "not accept imposition, interventionism, or anyone putting their filthy hands in our beloved country."

Brazil's Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva, traditionally a leftist ally of Maduro, took a harsh tone on Friday, describing the regime in Caracas as "very unpleasant" as he insisted it release a detailed vote breakdown.

In a radio interview, Lula declined to label the Maduro government a dictatorship, but said it had an "authoritarian bias."

"What I am asking for in order to be able to recognize (the winner) is at least to know if the numbers were true... I can only recognize them if they were democratic, if they show the evidence," he insisted.

The Organization of American States approved a resolution in Washington Friday urging Caracas to "expeditiously publish the presidential election records, including the voting results at the level of each polling station."

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